

Exposing K–12 Filipino Achievement Gaps and Opportunities in Hawai‘i Public Schools

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As a multicultural teacher educator, I am always interested in teachers’ perceptions of who their students are and where they come from. When I ask teachers who they think the largest ethnic groups in the Hawai‘i Department of Education (HIDOE) public schools are, most often they respond Japanese and then Chinese. Interestingly, the Japanese and Chinese ethnic groups have not made up the majority for a while. Since 2000, Native Hawaiian and Filipino¹ students have continued to take the top two spots of the most prevalent ethnic groups within the HIDOE, with Hawaiian (26 percent) and Filipino (22 percent) students together making up nearly half of the student population today.

Why is it important for teachers to know and understand the cultural demographics of their students? As educational scholar Lisa Delpit states, “In order to teach you, I must know you” (1995, 183). Although ethnicity is only one component of a student’s identity, knowing and understanding one’s ethnic background can give insight into how one’s histories, cultural traditions, values, and experiences may impact their experience in school. To teach effectively, teachers need to critically examine and care about the diversity of people and to understand systemic inequities and their implications on teaching and learning (Banks 2013; Gay 2010; Pang 2010).

The purpose of this study is to examine the academic experiences of one of the largest ethnic groups in Hawai‘i’s public school system: Filipinos. Filipinos have long been an under-examined group in Hawai‘i’s educational research. While attention is paid to Native Hawaiian students—rightfully so as students from the host culture—and increasingly on recent immigrant students such as Marshallese, Chuukeese, and other Micronesian ethnic groups, Filipinos have fallen under the radar as a diverse community ranging from members with local plantation roots, professionals, to recent immigrants.

Despite their presence in Hawai‘i since the 1900s, and despite their high population numbers and lower

achievement scores relative to their Asian and White peers in the HIDOE, Filipinos are rendered “an invisible majority.” The term *majority* highlights a contradiction in that one would expect a numerical majority would afford attention and power. However, sheer numbers does not translate into power. Filipinos are a “subordinate” ethnic group among the power dynamics and social hierarchy in Hawai‘i. Okamura’s (2008) analysis of the socioeconomic and educational inequalities characterized Chinese, Japanese, and Whites as socially and economically dominant, while Native Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Samoans were considered subordinate.

This case study exposed the academic achievement and opportunity gaps of Filipino Americans in Hawai‘i. It presents the first large scale and current examination of HIDOE data focused on making Filipinos central and visible to the discussion of academic achievement. It provides a baseline to understand the trends and status of K–12 Filipino education. It also examines student demographics intersected with variables such as ethnicity, class, gender, and language. Data was analyzed to identify target areas of challenges and strengths in order to improve instruction for Filipino student achievement. The research study concludes with recommendations for curricular and system reform.

Literature Review

A growing number of research studies compare the academic achievement among Asian American ethnic groups (Endo and Rong, 2013; Pang, Han and Pang, 2011; Sue & Okazaki, 2009); however, few have specifically delved into examining the educational experiences of K–12 Filipino students. Bonus and Maramba’s (2012) edited book, *The Other Students: Filipino Americans, Education and Power*, is one of the few works that discusses education and the Filipino historical context, identities, studies, pedagogy, and policy.

The research focused on Filipino K–12 academic achievement is even more minimal (Eng, Kanitkar,

Cleveland, Herbert, Fischer and Wiersma, 2008). The National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) commissioned the only report (2008) to examine Filipino K–12 education at a national level. The report, *Filipino American K–12 Public School Students: A National Survey*, aimed to “assess how Filipino students in K–12 public schools are performing academically in ten urban communities in various regions of the United States” (p.5). Hawai‘i was one of the sites selected to participate in this study. Hawai‘i’s data revealed contrasts of “Filipino firsts” (i.e., first Filipino governor) and challenges, with Filipino students ranking second to bottom out of its four major ethnic groups in math and language arts on the 2006 Hawai‘i State Assessments (HSA).

When examining scholarship focused on meeting the academic and social needs of Filipinos, most work centered around how to provide culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum to Filipino students (Halagao 2004; Nadal 2008). Other studies showed culturally responsive approaches such as *kurwento* (Jocson 2008), *pinayism* pedagogy (Tintiangco-Cubales and Sacramento 2009) and community responsive approaches (Lawsin 1998). Halagao et al. (2009) conducted a critical study of the literature of K–12 Filipino curricula to show there was indeed a significant amount of curriculum and instruction focused on Filipino American history, culture, and related issues. Other studies looked at Filipino educational experiences through the lens of critical race theory by examining how systems and structures have not benefitted Filipinos’ access to post-secondary education (Buenavista 2010). These findings revealed stereotypes and micro-aggressions against Filipino students as well as the lack of multicultural curriculum and qualified teachers.

Methodology

This study used a case study method because of its focus on a unit of analysis bounded by time and place (Merriam 1998). It was centered on one issue: understanding the academic achievement and opportunity gaps of K–12 Filipinos in the HIDOE. The context of this study was the HIDOE, which was established in 1840 and is the ninth largest school district and the only statewide educational district in the United States. HIDOE is comprised of 255 schools and thirty-three charter schools serving approximately 185,000 students and employing 13,000 teachers.

In this case study, the primary instrument of data collection and analysis was myself. As the researcher, my role was to investigate and uncover the qualities and significance of the phenomena (Merriam 1998; 2009). The data collected in this case study were three types: demographic data (student population and concentration), academic achievement data (according to state assessments, proficiency scores, school complexes, graduation, and college-going rates), and quantitative intersectionality (achievement data cross examined by multiple variables such as ethnicity, gender, class, and language).² Data analysis and reduction involved a multi-step process (Merriam 2009). Focus questions were determined around each data set and then the data was analyzed to see if there were any patterns that arose, which led to a hypothesis and lessons learned with the intent to improve instruction.

Findings

The demographic data focused on understanding the questions, “who are our students?” and “where are they concentrated?” Filipinos are currently the second largest ethnic group in the HIDOE at 22.42 percent, behind Native Hawaiian students at 25.64 percent (Figure 1). White and Japanese students round out the top four racial and ethnic groups in the HIDOE. Data was gathered at the school level from self-reporting of parents.

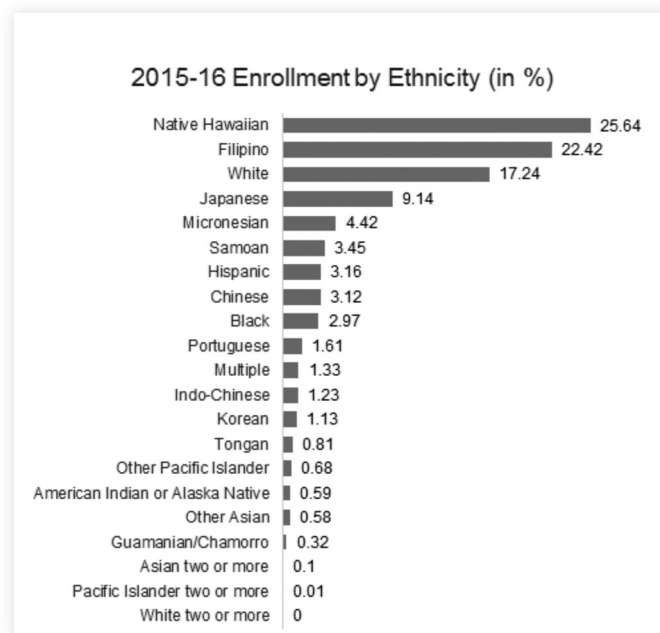


Figure 1

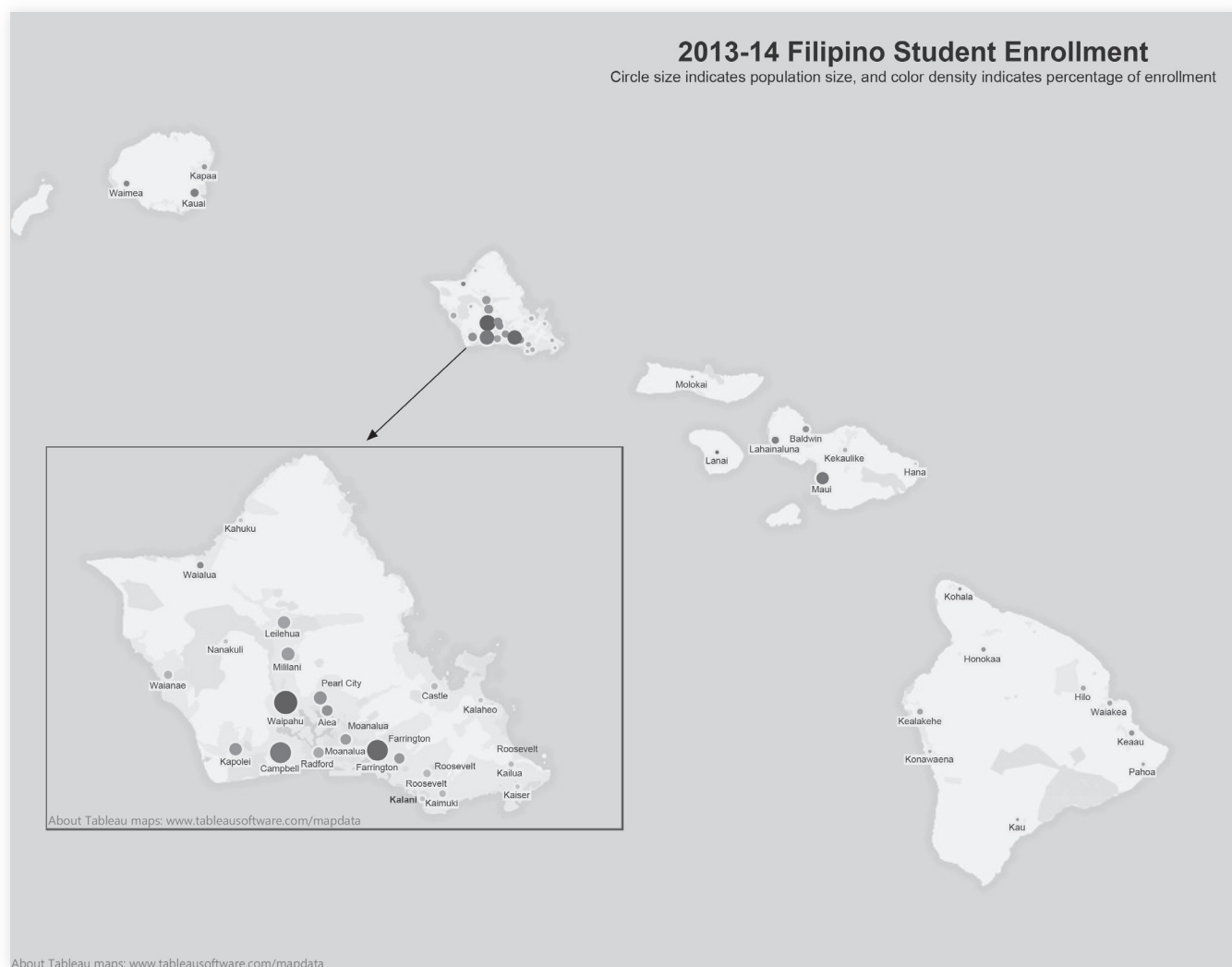


Figure 2

While Hawaii's public schools are racially and ethnically diverse, ethnic groups are concentrated in particular areas. Details about these ethnic concentrations can be found at <http://bit.ly/ep-map>. Filipino students are largely concentrated on O'ahu, especially in its central and leeward areas. The next largest concentrations of Filipino students are found on Maui and Kaua'i. Figure 2 shows 2013–2014 Filipino student enrollments across the islands with Waipahu, Farrington, and Campbell complexes drawing the most Filipinos.

The academic achievement data focused on understanding these questions: What is student achievement according to race/ethnicity based on standardized tests, graduation, and college-going rates? What achievement patterns emerge? The HDOE's accountability system (StiveHI) displays

student achievement in broad categories such as race, disadvantaged, English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education (SPED), etc. (Table 1). According to the 2015 data, White and Asian students are generally scoring higher than all students statewide. Subgroups like English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education (SPED), Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders are scoring well-below proficiency achievement levels. These statistics provide a general picture of achievement levels, but obscure differences among ethnic groups.

Figure 3 further breaks down state assessment results in language arts and math based on ethnicity according to the previous Hawai'i State Assessments (school year 2011–2014) and the new Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA), which the

SchCode: 999
School Year Ending: 2015

Strive HI: Student Group Performance Report
State of Hawaii

Target	English Language Arts/Literacy				Math				Science				Graduation Rate	
	Participation 95%		Meeting Standard 48 %		Participation 95%		Meeting Standard 41 %		Participation 95%		Proficiency 47 %		Objective >= 85 %	
	%	Met?	%	Met?	%	Met?	%	Met?	%	Met?	%	Met?	%	Met?
All Students	98%	Yes	48%	Yes	97%	Yes	41%	Yes	96%	Yes	42%	No	82%	No
Disadvantaged	97%	Yes	36%	No	97%	Yes	30%	No	95%	Yes	31%	No	78%	No
Disabled (SPED)	94%	No	13% ⁱⁱ	No	94%	No	11% ⁱⁱ	No	91%	No	14% ⁱⁱ	No	59%	No
Limited English (ELL)	96%	Yes	32% ⁱ	No	94%	No	30% ⁱ	No	91%	No	24% ⁱ	No	53%	No
Asian/Pacific Islander	98%	Yes	46%	No	97%	Yes	40%	No	96%	Yes	39%	No	83%	No
Black	98%	Yes	49%	Yes	97%	Yes	33%	No	98%	Yes	39%	No	77%	No
Hispanic	98%	Yes	45%	No	97%	Yes	37%	No	96%	Yes	41%	No	77%	No
Native American	96%	Yes	45%	No	96%	Yes	34%	No	95%	Yes	45%	No	74%	No
White	97%	Yes	63%	Yes	97%	Yes	53%	Yes	97%	Yes	60%	Yes	81%	No
Asian	99%	Yes	58%	Yes	98%	Yes	51%	Yes	98%	Yes	49%	Yes	89%	Yes
Pacific Islander	96%	Yes	27%	No	96%	Yes	21%	No	93%	No	19%	No	72%	No
Native Hawaiian	97%	Yes	34%	No	96%	Yes	28%	No	95%	Yes	29%	No	78%	No

If asterisk (*), results are suppressed to protect student identity in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

This report replaces the earlier version posted on 9/24/15. This report now includes ELA and mathematics targets (aka, AMOs) and corresponding "Met" or "Not Met" outcomes where applicable. Proficiency rates may change for ELL and SPED subgroups due to the inclusion of Recently Exited students into the rate calculation when the target is not met by current ELL or SPED students alone.

Index Classification: n/a

Source of Displayed Percentage Value

i

ELL and ELL Exits Achievement Rate

ii

SPED and SPED Exits Achievement Rate

Table 1

Asian	Asian two or more; Chinese; Japanese; Korean; Indo-Chinese; Other Asian
Filipino	Filipino
White	Portuguese; White; White two or more
Native Hawaiian	Native Hawaiian; Part-Hawaiian
Samoan	Samoan
Micronesia	Micronesia

Table 2

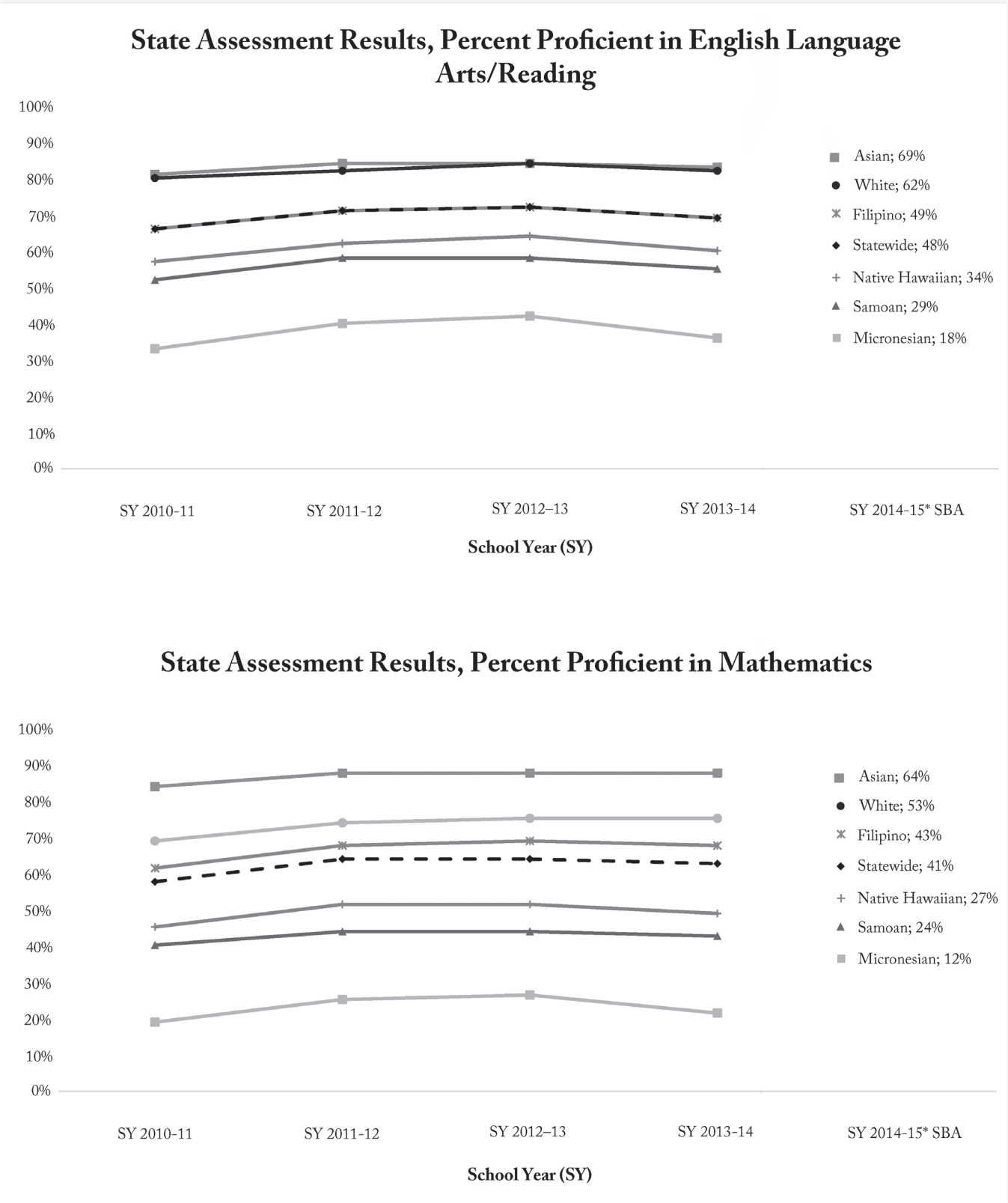


Figure 3

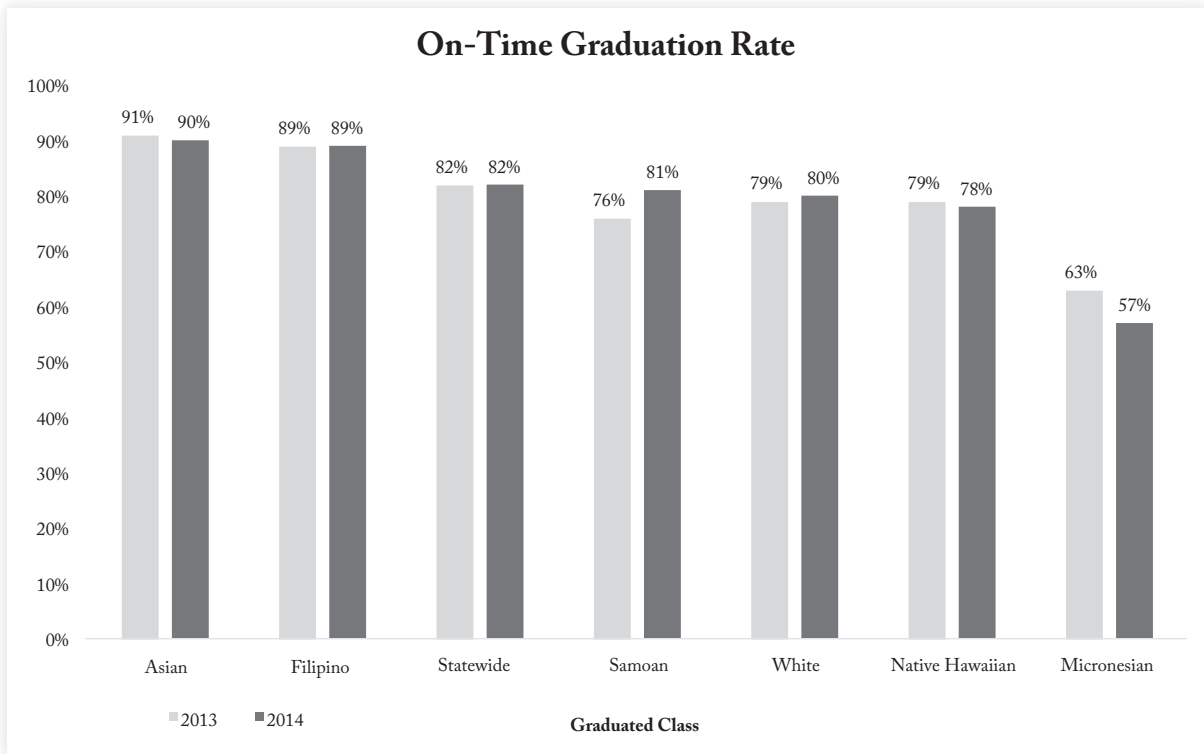


Figure 4

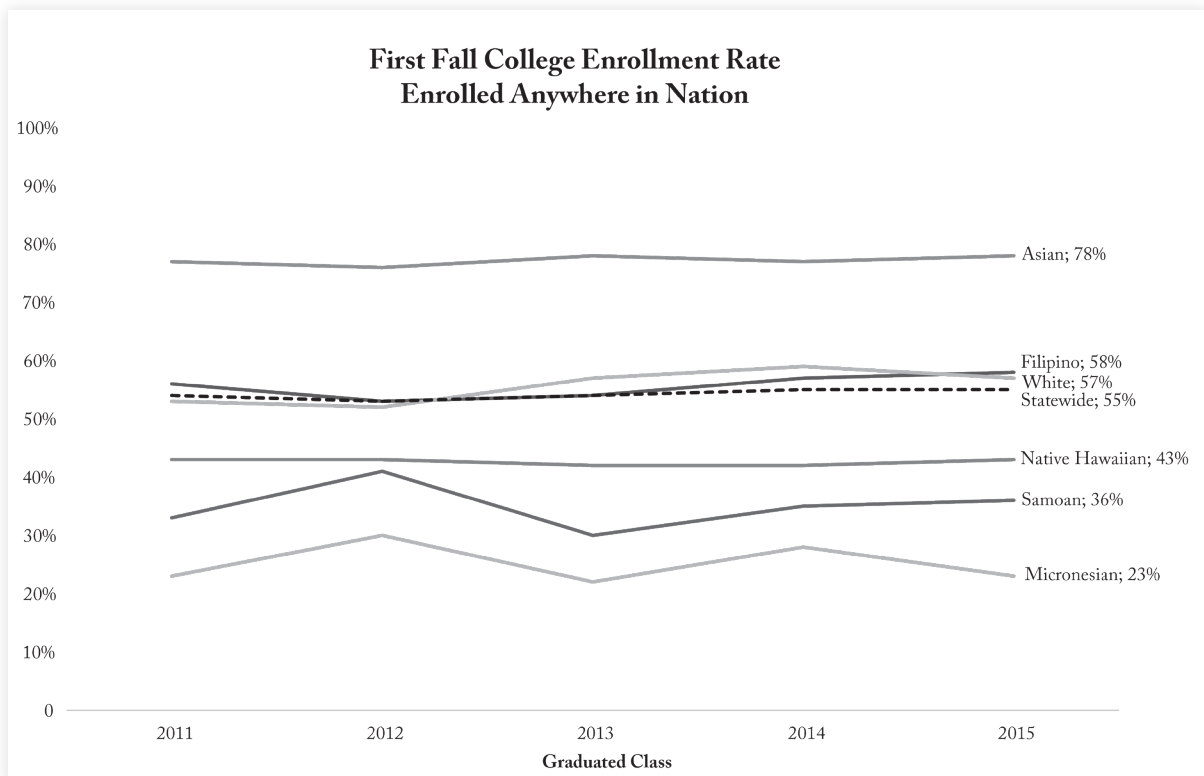


Figure 5

By Race/Ethnicity, Gender	English Language Arts				Mathematics			
	PL 1	PL 2	PL 3	PL 4	PL 1	PL 2	PL 3	PL 4
Asian								
Female	9%	15%	35%	41%	11%	22%	30%	37%
Male	17%	20%	35%	28%	16%	23%	28%	34%
Filipino								
Female	17%	26%	37%	21%	23%	31%	28%	18%
Male	30%	28%	29%	13%	30%	30%	23%	16%
Micronesian								
Female	50%	27%	19%	4%	60%	26%	10%	3%
Male	63%	23%	11%	2%	66%	24%	9%	2%
Native Hawaiian								
Female	29%	29%	30%	11%	37%	34%	20%	9%
Male	46%	27%	21%	6%	44%	30%	18%	8%
Samoa								
Female	34%	31%	26%	9%	42%	32%	19%	8%
Male	49%	28%	18%	6%	48%	30%	15%	6%
White								
Female	12%	18%	34%	35%	18%	28%	29%	24%
Male	21%	23%	32%	24%	22%	26%	27%	25%
Statewide by Gender								
Female	21%	24%	33%	23%	27%	30%	25%	18%
Male	33%	25%	27%	15%	33%	28%	22%	17%
Statewide	27%	25%	30%	19%	30%	29%	24%	17%

Table 3

HIDOE fully transitioned into in school year 2014–2015.³ The list of HIDOE’s top racial and ethnicity groups used in this study are shown in Table 2⁴.

While it is important to not compare the results between HSA and SBA, both results illustrate academic achievement gaps among its ethnic and racial groups, with Asian and White students scoring the highest in proficiency and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander groups scoring the lowest. According to the 2014–2015 SBA results, Filipino students are scoring proficient at the statewide average in language arts (49 percent) and slightly better in math (43 percent) in comparison to their peers. When Filipino students are separated from the Asian category, they scored significantly lower (20 percent) than their Asian peers. Since 2011, the HSA proficiency rates in reading and math among all ethnic groups have remained relatively stagnant, although existing gaps have largely stayed the same, with Filipinos ranking third among the four largest and historically longest ethnic groups in Hawai‘i.

Other indicators of student achievement are high school graduation and college enrollment data.⁵ Overall, Filipinos graduated at a higher rate compared to their peers (89 percent), but at slightly a slightly lower rate compared to Asian groups in 2014 (Figure 4). White, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islanders lagged below the statewide average (82 percent). Filipino students in Hawai‘i also enrolled in college anywhere in the nation at a much higher rate than their peers (58 percent), with the exception of Asians students (78 percent) (Figure 5).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the theory of how different forms of oppression and discrimination interact (Crenshaw 1989). It allows us to help deconstruct how these categories influence the individual and group experience at large. In this case, looking at intersectionality data helped critically examine what is happening when we cross-examined achievement results from Smarter Balanced Assessments (2014–2015)

By Race/Ethnicity, Economic Status	English Language Arts				Mathematics			
	PL 1	PL 2	PL 3	PL 4	PL 1	PL 2	PL 3	PL 4
Asian								
Economically Disadvantaged	24%	22%	33%	22%	21%	29%	26%	25%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	9%	16%	36%	39%	10%	20%	30%	40%
Filipino								
Economically Disadvantaged	30%	29%	29%	12%	32%	32%	23%	13%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	17%	25%	36%	22%	21%	30%	28%	21%
Micronesian								
Economically Disadvantaged	58%	25%	15%	3%	63%	25%	9%	2%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	39%	32%	23%	6%	54%	27%	15%	4%
Native Hawaiian								
Economically Disadvantaged	43%	29%	22%	6%	45%	32%	17%	6%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	25%	28%	33%	14%	30%	32%	24%	14%
Samoa								
Economically Disadvantaged	46%	30%	19%	5%	49%	31%	15%	5%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	25%	28%	31%	17%	31%	32%	23%	15%
White								
Economically Disadvantaged	26%	25%	31%	18%	30%	31%	24%	15%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	12%	19%	34%	35%	15%	25%	31%	29%
Statewide by Economic Status								
Economically Disadvantaged	37%	27%	25%	10%	40%	31%	19%	10%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	16%	22%	35%	28%	20%	27%	28%	25%
Statewide	27%	25%	30%	19%	30%	29%	24%	17%

Table 4

in language arts and math with variables such as ethnicity, gender, class, place, and language⁶.

Gender. When broken down according to gender, Filipino girls outscored boys in proficiency rates, reflecting a trend in all ethnic and gender groups (Table 3).

Socioeconomic Status. Across the board, proficiency by ethnicity and economic disadvantage showed the “not economically disadvantaged” outscoring economically disadvantaged (Table 4). In all cases, it did not matter if you were a Filipino boy or girl, advantaged or disadvantaged, Filipinos always ranked third in achievement among Asian, White, Filipino, and Native Hawaiians.

Place. Interesting patterns emerged when examining Filipino achievement according to school complex areas in the 2013 Hawai'i State Assessments (Figure 6). Complex areas are K–12 schools that are organized geographically and led by a Complex Area Superintendent (CAS).

The data revealed that Filipino proficiency rates were higher in complex schools with fewer Filipinos and in

schools with more resources and higher socioeconomic populations (e.g., Mililani, Kaiser, and Waiākea), possibly reflecting the impact of socioeconomics on achievement (Gorski 2013). It was also interesting to note outlier results. For example, Filipinos did relatively well in rural communities like Waialua on O'ahu and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities like Kea'au and Pāhoa on the Big Island. However, achievement levels for Filipino students on Kaua'i and Lāna'i were significantly lower than on other islands.

It is also important to consider separating out the data *within* a complex area because there may be very different achievement patterns between its complex schools. A good example is the Hilo-Waiākea complex area. While both complexes that make up the complex area were fairly high-performing, the slightly more affluent Waiākea complex outperformed the Hilo complex on most metrics. Combining the data across these two areas might obscure important variation.

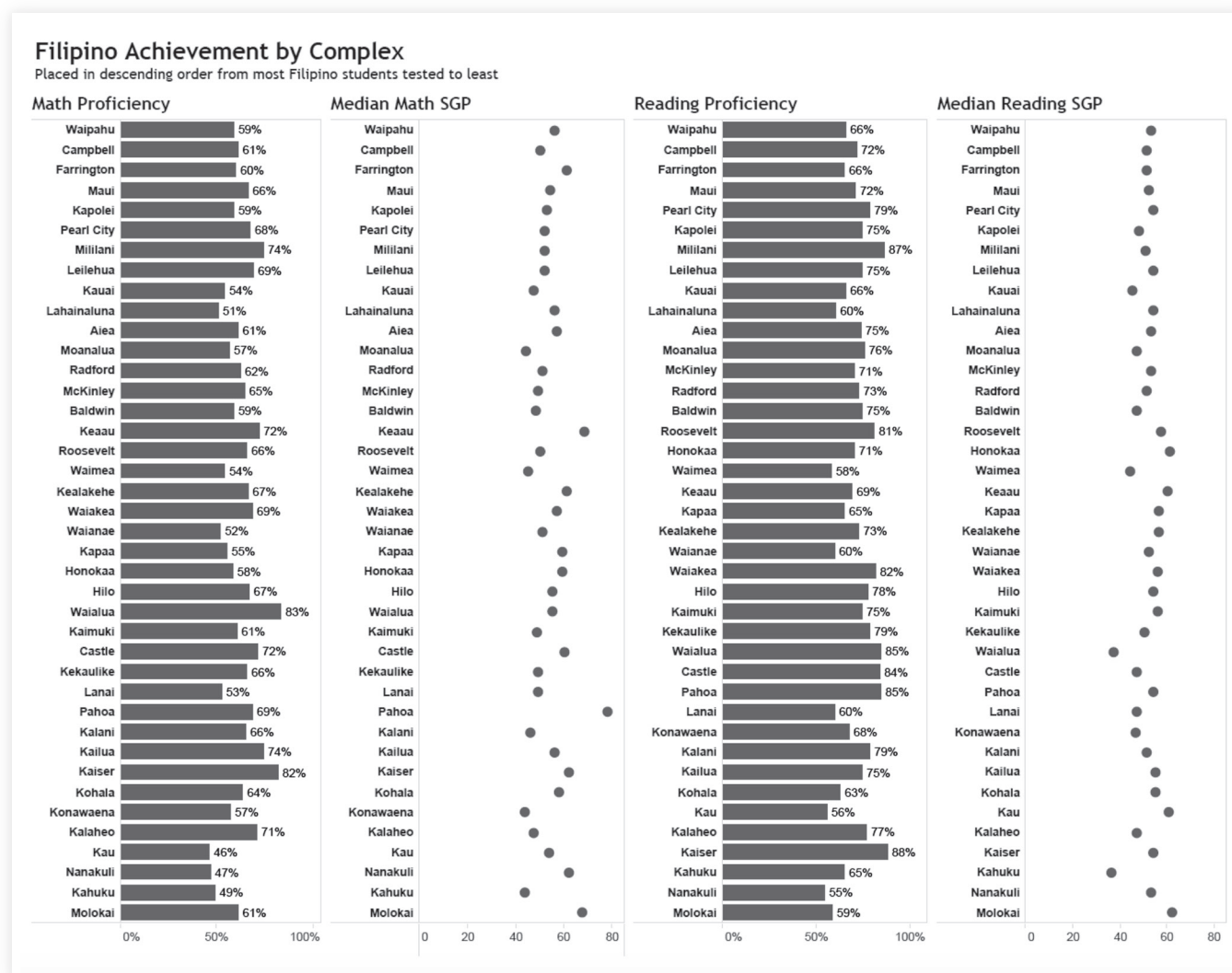


Figure 6

Language. According to a Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism report (2016), approximately one-in-four people in Hawai'i speak a language other than English at home, a higher percentage than the U.S. average. Students classified as English Learners (EL) make up a significant population in HIDOE with their numbers averaging 10–13 percent over the past five years. HIDOE ranked 13th highest in EL enrollment of school districts in the nation (Soto, Hooker & Batalova, 2015).

The highest numbers of home languages spoken by EL students in the HIDOE are Philippine languages (e.g., Ilokano, Tagalog, Pampangan) at 30 percent, closely

followed by Micronesian languages (e.g., Chuukese and Marshallese) at 29 percent. Details on the distribution of languages across the state of Hawai'i can be found here: <http://bitly/ep.languages>. Ilokano (21 percent) alone is the top language used in schools, with Tagalog ranking as the fourth most spoken language (8 percent) in the schools. Outside of O'ahu, there are high concentrations of Philippine languages spoken in Kaua'i, Lāna'i City, and Maui.

According to the 2015 HIDOE accountability system report, roughly 30 percent of EL students performed proficiently in language arts and math. A mere 53 percent of EL students are graduating. It is important to note that these calculations were higher because they included recently

Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) School Year 2014-15

English Language Arts, SBA		SY 2014-15
Filipino	Proficient	Tested
Not English Language Learner	53%	19,003
English Language Learner	4%	1,568
Filipino Average	49%	20,571
Mathematics, SBA		SY 2014-15
Filipino	Proficient	Tested
Not English Language Learner	46%	18,976
English Language Learner	7%	1,668
Filipino Average	43%	20,644

Table 5

exited EL students from the EL program. When comparing 2014–2015 SBA results of Filipinos students who are not EL to current active Filipino EL students, the disparity was significant, with current/active EL students underperforming in English language arts and math. (Table 5).

Discussion

For many of us who work in the field of education focused on the experiences of Filipinos, the findings of this case study might be both surprising and expected. It is surprising because it challenges the perception that Filipinos are not doing well in the HIDOE. Relative to their peers, Filipinos fall in the middle of the pack scoring near the state average in language arts and math proficiency. One reason they reside closer to the statewide average might be because Filipinos make up a significant student population. And based on 2014 data, Filipinos graduated (89 percent) and went to college (58 percent) at rates that are above the statewide average. However, Libarios and Bachini (2016) point out in the next article that most Filipinos are going to two-year community colleges at a higher rate than four-year institutions, with attendance to UH-Manoa (9 percent) disproportionate to the K–12 Filipino student population (22 percent).

These findings from the K–12 state assessments also quantitatively validate what we have known about our students in the K–12 public school system based on traditional forms of assessments: Filipino youth are not

academically performing up to their potential and abilities. We should not be satisfied with a mediocre performance barely surpassing a low statewide average. A close look at Filipino assessment scores show approximately 30 percent of the Filipino student population had not made significant gains in meeting HAS proficiency levels in the past four years, and roughly 50 percent are not meeting proficiency levels in the new SBA.

The educational system needs to do more to address the achievement gap and provide opportunities for Filipinos to succeed. First, we must raise awareness of the academic achievement between Filipinos and other ethnic/racial groups and among Filipino subgroups. Next, we should focus our attention on opportunity gaps in our educational system. Finally, we must reframe the conversation to find the solutions in our student's backgrounds and strengths.

Raise Critical Awareness

As the second largest ethnic group in the school system, more attention must be paid to the Filipino educational experience. The public, HIDOE educators, and Filipino community lack a general awareness of the status of Filipinos in education, perhaps because Filipinos do not rank the most negatively on indicators and, thus, do not generate the same amount of attention as other struggling groups. Part of this lack of awareness stems from the way HIDOE data has been disseminated to represent the student populations. When the student populations are lumped under large racial

categories, it is difficult to recognize the different experiences of ethnic groups. Traditionally Filipinos have been subsumed under the Asian category. This masks their academic under-performance, which is 20 percent lower than that of their Asian peers. Further disparities arise when gender, socioeconomics, and EL issues are taken into account in all ethnic groups; more attention must be paid to Filipino subgroups who are male, economically disadvantaged, and EL students.

More critical thought must be given to how education is linked to systems of power and oppression in Hawai‘i. The academic ranking of Filipinos in relation to the four largest ethnic groups have remained enduring over time, with Filipinos situated consistently second to bottom. Their positioning reflects Hawaii’s social hierarchy of Asians and Whites on top, followed by Filipinos, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders at the bottom, thus reifying social structures of power (Okamura 2008). If we do not pay attention to Filipino students, they will continue to be an “invisible majority” in schools, resulting in their subordinate ranking and perpetuating the social hierarchy in Hawai‘i society.

Achievement vs. Opportunity Gaps

It is important to look beyond the idea of closing the achievement gap and look at how academic issues arise when viewed from a different perspective—that of an opportunity gap. The gap in academic achievement focuses on outputs and the unequal and inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits. It looks at the end result and not necessarily at the reasons behind the issues and sources of the problems. The idea of an opportunity gap refers to inputs—the unequal or inequitable distribution of funding, resources, and opportunities. If we hope to make change, we need to balance the measurement of outcomes with a strong emphasis on examining inputs and external forces that impact the quality of a student’s education (Carter and Welner 2013).

The low achievement numbers should not be the sole reflection of failure on the students’ and schools’ part. Students are impacted by countless other factors that they have no control over. For example, among family households with school-age children, Filipinos have the second lowest mean income among the state’s major ethnic groups (US Census Bureau, 2006–2010). There is a link between low academic

statistics and inequalities related to power and wealth. Structural and systematic influences like racism, classism, and discrimination have an adverse affect on the educational experiences of Filipinos.

Schools that serve lower socioeconomic students often do not have the same kind of quality and availability of resources for their students. However, it is important to note that schools still find ways to overcome these challenges and provide opportunities. For example, high schools with high numbers of economically disadvantaged and Filipino students offer dual credit and early college programs, which have improved college-going rates (i.e., Waipahu and Farrington High School) (Kalani, 2016).

In addition, the teacher retention rate and teacher quality tends to be much lower in schools that serve lower socioeconomic students (Glazerman & Max, 2011). Furthermore, many teachers lack professional development and background knowledge about who their students are, specifically those who work with Filipinos. For example, it is important to understand the psychology of Filipino students and how institutions and social systems have shaped them and their educational opportunities. The historical legacy of colonialism has impacted Filipino identity and has created a sense of a colonial racial hierarchy (David and Okazaki 2006). In addition, an inherited plantation mentality and attitude might also result in a sense of cultural inferiority, the inability to articulate ethnic identity, and a lack of ethnic pride (Strobel 2001). When a student does not have a strong sense of who they are, it is hard for them to achieve academically. These students may also face higher rates of stereotype threat and micro-aggressions, which can further inhibit academic success.

Lack of professional development that focuses on the needs of Filipino students prevents teachers from teaching in culturally responsive ways, which use the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students to teach them more effectively. When academic knowledge and practical skills are situated within the lived experiences of students, schoolwork becomes more personally meaningful and interesting and is learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay 2010). Academic achievement improves when students are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters. It is instructive that the highest growth rates of HSA in language arts and math were found in the Ka‘u and Pāhoā districts on the Big Island where there is a strong emphasis

on culturally responsive practices and that it occurred in spite of the fact that the largest ethnic population in these districts were Native Hawaiian. Attention to culturally appropriate methods point to one reason why Filipinos might be scoring higher in this complex than other places.

According to HIDOE data, teachers of Filipino ancestry make up a small percentage of the teacher population (6 percent), which is inversely proportional to the numbers of students in the school system. This results in fewer Filipino teacher role models for Filipino students.

Act on our strengths

Highlighting deficits like negative achievement data and the underrepresentation of Filipino teachers in the teaching profession will only get us so far. A lead evaluator at Kamehameha Schools said she realized the school needed to change the framing of *Ka Huakai: 2014 Native Hawaiian Educational Assessment* (2014), a historical data sourcebook on Hawaiians, because negative statistic after negative statistic hurt their na‘au (gut). She shared that a better approach was to focus on strengths rather than deficits: “the solutions are not found in the problems, but rather focus on change through our strengths” (personal communication, March 2015). In order to create change for groups who are traditionally marginalized, we need to understand their needs, but not dwell on the deficits.

We need to instead build on their strengths. One area of strength for our Filipino youth is in our multilingual abilities. Many Filipino youth come to school knowing multiple languages such as Filipino, Ilokano, and English. Instead of labeling our Filipino students as English Learner (EL), their multilingual abilities should be viewed as rich assets that should be nurtured, valued, and used as resources for learning. A suite of linguistic and cultural Hawai‘i Board of Education (BOE) policies like the Seal of Biliteracy and Multilingualism for Equitable Education reinforces the value of Filipino immigrant student languages and supports evidence-based interventions like dual language and bilingual education for our Filipino EL students.

Limitations

A limitation to this study is that the data relied mainly on standards-based assessments, graduation, and college-going rates as the indicators of achievement. Academic achievement was based on students’ test scores in language

arts and math, which is a narrow way of measuring success. If success had been assessed on different indicators such as the number of languages that students know, then Filipinos would be ranked higher. I also acknowledge that standardized tests are often culturally-biased and not a complete indication of what a child knows—especially children whose first language is not English. Assessing children in the language that they are not familiar with does little to test content, but rather tests their English abilities.

To supplement the quantitative data in this study, future research could collect and analyze qualitative and other multiple forms of data according to ethnicity and race (i.e., perceptual data, school process data, school climate, and health and well-being data). This richer set of information about Filipino students would present a more holistic picture of what truly is going on in the lives of our students and schools.

Implications and Recommendations

This study aimed to raise public consciousness of Filipino students’ educational experiences around some of the metrics that the HIDOE uses to measure academic success. It provided the first baseline of Filipino educational achievement in Hawai‘i to measure progress over time. It also focused on the opportunity gaps that educators, administrators, policy makers, and researchers need to address. We cannot afford to continue to sit on the sidelines and not pay attention to the academic, social, and cultural needs of a quarter of our student population. If we invest in targeting this group, then imagine the returns. This study proposes the following recommendations around five areas: evaluation, targeted qualitative research, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, diverse assessment, and community empowerment.

The first step is to adopt and develop a robust data collection, research, and evaluation plan to study student achievement under the new assessment system. Next is to publically report and disaggregate student data according to ethnicities, such as separating out Filipinos from the Asian category. We also need to begin to track students and conduct school-level data analysis for institutional racism (i.e., tracking, honors courses, college-going rates, and careers). By conducting more qualitative research studies on schools, we can explore reasons why some complex

areas and particular schools show higher gains in academic achievement than other schools and classrooms.

At the same time, it is important to promote culturally and linguistically responsive practices in the classroom through teacher professional development and pre-service training to help teachers better connect their pedagogy and curriculum to their Filipino students. At the very least, this study recommends concentrating Filipino professional development and curricular resources in areas with high Filipino student concentrations.

In addition, when assessment methods are simultaneously transformed, teaching practices will change. This study recommends more diverse forms of assessment that truly assess students' successes. While standards-based assessments serve to understand student achievement at a particular point in time and are helpful in shedding light on issues of equity between groups of students, equal focus needs to be placed on using formative assessments and not simply on tests that focus solely on student outcomes. More diverse forms of assessment that are tied to project-based learning will help all students show what they know in more authentic and multilingual ways. Such approaches to assessment will also encourage educators to be more innovative, relevant, and rigorous.

Because Filipino languages make up one third of the languages spoken in our classrooms, more attention needs to be paid to honoring the linguistic and cultural diversity of our students and families and targeting specific professional development and language resources toward its local community. More equitable and meaningful services, such as dual language programs for our most widely spoken immigrant languages like Ilokano and Tagalog, will help our Filipino multilingual/EL students better learn the academic content, maintain their home language, and gain proficiency in the official language medium of education, whether it be English or Hawaiian (Collier & Thomas, 2014).

In conclusion, Filipino students have made progress in the HIDE, but more work needs to be done. When the Filipino community is equipped with understanding the achievement status of our students, they are empowered to advocate for educational change and demand greater accountability from our schools and educational leaders. More specifically, they can call for disaggregation of racial data, culturally and linguistically responsive education, and support for successful strategies like early college and dual

enrollment that benefit Filipino and economically disadvantaged students. Filipino organizations, parents, academics, and schools must work together to collectively transform the system. As Freire (1989) states, "The pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors... the oppressed must be their own examples in the struggle for their redemption" (p. 54). We need to find it in ourselves to dream what is possible and take action for the betterment of our students.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The term encompasses Filipino immigrants and local born Filipino Americans.
- ² Data was provided by the Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education's Hawai'i Data eXchange Partnership. Thank you to former HIDEOE staff member David Moyer for the demographic and complex-area data visuals.
- ³ Results excludes students who did not take the assessment and reported figures may not match official figures due to differences in calculation, namely "full school year" is not taken into account in this dataset.
- ⁴ Not included (but represented in statewide average) are American Indian, Alaska Native; Black; Hispanic; Multiple; Tongan; Pacific Islander two or more; Guamanian/Chamorro; Other Pacific Islander.
- ⁵ Students who transfer out of a school are excluded from the denominator when calculating the graduation rate. On-time graduation rate includes students who graduated by the end of the summer of their cohort year, but excludes students who earned a certificate of completion.
- ⁶ Proficiency level (PL) 3 is the minimum level for Proficient.